

Hebrews 11:24-26

Pentecost 5, Supplement Series C, June 19, 2016

Theme: Your attention is captivated by Christ

INJ Principal Lange had his students make a collage that represented the things they liked. After cutting pictures from magazines, each person pasted them together to make a finished product. You can imagine there were pictures of basketball and other sports. Plenty of pets. Some cut out images of fishing. Technology. Music. All sorts of things showed up to reflect the interests of each student. The art revealed the child's personality.

What would you include in your collage? Pictures of your children and grandchildren. Cooking, yard work, sports teams. Trips you took or experiences from the past. All of those images have a place in reflecting who you are. I suppose you can do that automatically from the posts on your Facebook page. But here is the question you should have been expecting: Does Jesus show up in your collage? How much does Jesus influence your activities and interests? Does God and his word make a prominent showing in your identity, online or in person? I have to say that the collages of the St. Luke's students often did reflect their Christian faith.

Today we look at the Old Testament person named Moses. The writer to the Hebrews encourages us with the fact that Moses lived "by faith." The LORD his God was not a small part of his existence, but filled it full. From Moses we see that to live "by faith" is to have our attention captivated by Christ.

If the Bible History of Moses is not familiar to you, let me summarize. Moses' family was not a traditional one. His parents were still together, but they did not raise Moses on their own. You see, the Pharaoh of Egypt had forbidden any Hebrew boy babies to be born. He ordered that they should be killed at birth. To avoid the murder, Moses' parents put the baby in a basket and floated it down the Nile River. At just the right time, the daughter of the Pharaoh saw the basket and rescued the baby. She took Moses into her home and he became her adopted son.

Only Pharaoh's daughter was not nursing, and the baby needed to eat. She called for someone to meet this need, and guess who volunteered? The birth mother and father were able to spend the first precious years raising their own son, Moses.

But then it was time for him to join Pharaoh's family. Moses was raised in the realm of royalty. Every advantage was at his fingertips: wealth,

influence, opportunity, education. It was quite a contrast: his natural family were believers in the Promised Savior. They were slaves, despised by the Egyptians and oppressed by the Pharaoh. Moses' adopted family was privileged and powerful, and steeped in the idolatry of Egypt.

The writer to the Hebrews tells us what made Moses an example for us to follow: Moses lived by faith in the One True God. His natural parents taught him about the LORD, the God of Israel. The LORD would save his people from their sins. Egypt was not their home, but the LORD would lead them to the Promised Land. They had eternal blessings from him.

Would you choose the royal life of Moses? You could hang out with famous people. Servants would handle all your needs. You would live in luxury. All the idols of Egypt and the salacious lifestyle of the powerful would be yours. It would be like living in the United States of America!

Moses was not distracted by all that drivel. He made a determined confession that he would be known as a Hebrew, not an Egyptian. He was a believer in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not an idol worshiper. He would not indulge in the sin promoted by his society and his peers. He left behind the privilege and depravity of the royal house and walked by faith. By faith he "refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time."

Intellectually, we can say we do what Moses did. Our faith boldly stands in contrast to our society, right? When it comes to actually making the choices – that is not so easy. Was it hard to come to worship today, rather than do something else? Do you struggle with making entertainment choices that are in line with your Christian faith? If the people around you drink too much, or are comfortable with vulgar or violent things, do you blend in and participate? Is it your determined confession to live by faith?

Part of our struggle is with timing. God wants me to avoid the sin. I want to avoid it, too! But the temptation is right here, right now. Any consequences from God seem distant and small. It is easy to give in to the pleasures of sin for a short time.

Then come the consequences. The subtle damage to my connection with God. His deserved threat of eternal condemnation. If only I had avoided the sin back when! But I often choose instant gratification over living by faith. Moses cannot help me choose between living for now and trusting God's promises. Jesus is the answer. He captures my attention!

Yet, there is plenty of competition for our attention. Commercials are everywhere. The immediate needs we have are often urgent. Considerable effort is put into pushing us to make quick decisions without

thinking them through. Jesus wants your attention. He gives you his word and the sacraments. The Holy Spirit dwells in your heart. Are you focused on Jesus? Yes! Until something distracts you. Look! It is new, shiny, popular, good for you! Jesus gets forgotten, left in the dust.

How does Jesus get our attention? He wants our hearts, but our hearts are so quickly impressed by empty spirituality. We naturally follow what feels good. Agreeing with popular trends is easy. Jesus isn't easy. Living in Christian faith is hard. It demands that you make choices like Moses did. Jesus captures your attention by what he did for you.

Jesus shocks you first, by telling you "No!" He exposes your sin. He calls you on your absorption with yourself. He tells you to stop despising God's Word. Quit defiling yourself with sexual sins. Don't succumb to anger or drugs or alcohol. Jesus commands you to help your neighbor and to love God above all things. Because you don't, you stand condemned.

Does Jesus have your attention? Good. Because he wants you to see what he did for you. Jesus put aside all his divine glory and power, and did not use it while he put himself in your place. He faced every temptation and burden and trial you do. Blood and sweat and tears. Exhaustion and loneliness. He was despised and rejected. He was reviled and mocked. All of it was for you. Jesus obeyed every demand of God perfectly, for you. He measured out all the punishment you deserved, even endured being forsaken by the Father for you. Jesus went to the cross and carried it in your place. Does he have your attention still? He died a horrible and bloody death and was condemned for your sins. So much has he loved you!

Jesus rose from the dead to proclaim to you forgiveness and peace. You have a home in heaven forever with him. He works through his words and the sacraments to give you faith and to keep you in it. All the impossible things have been done for you! Jesus sends the Holy Spirit to capture your attention and to keep it fixed on him. You live "by faith!"

Look! You can avoid any suffering if you cave in to temptation. Don't listen! Look! No one will care if you call yourself a Christian but don't live like it. Jesus says to take up your cross and follow him. He captures your attention by his word. He gives you the intention, the desire, and the ability to live by faith. Close your eyes to the distractions! The cross is your focus.

The hardest part of a cross-focus, is that the reward is not now. If I give in to temptation, I have instant gratification. If I resist, all I get is continued temptation. Satan doesn't stop with the lies and empty promises. Wouldn't it be easier to go along with him? Never! Living by faith is to look to Jesus and see that what counts is coming. What counts is heaven. What

counts is the unseen and often unfelt truth of forgiveness in Christ. I would rather have my home with him forever than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. Jesus, capture my attention again and again! Cleanse me of my sin, my failure, my distraction. Keep me close to you so I live by faith.

You see, living by faith is always a struggle. It is hard to live in repentance and to rejoice in forgiveness. The allure of the world is always enticing. It comes down to a First Commandment issue. Does Jesus come first? Do I love him more than these pleasures? And every time I measure myself by the First Commandment, I fail. So many things take God's place in my activity and my attention. Look! Isn't this more important?

What is most important is what Jesus has done for me, for you. Stop looking at the commandment and look at the cross! Jesus kept the First Commandment perfectly, for everyone. He always loved God above all things. Always trusted him above all things. Always feared him above all things. And all his perfection has been credited to your account. When God looks at you, he sees you covered with Christ's righteousness. He declared you not guilty of every sin. Jesus captivates your attention, doesn't he?

Forgiven, with eyes stuck on the cross, we begin again, this life of faith. We take up our cross and follow Jesus, denying ourselves daily. And before we know it we have failed again! Distracted. Enthralled by sin. Proud. Rebellious. Forgetful. All of it is in us. The only solution is outside of us. By faith, we see Jesus again. Crucified and risen. Victorious. Powerful. Promising rescue from this misery and giving life in heaven.

Jesus has our attention again! "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." (Rom 10:17) "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another, and all the more, as you see the Day approaching." (Heb 10:25) "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom; and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." (Col 3:15)

When Jesus has captivated our attention, God produces a determined confession in us. We will live by faith! Like Moses, we will make the hard choice to forsake temporary pleasure for the reproach of Christ. Like Joseph we will flee sexual temptation, and bear the unjust punishment that comes from living "by faith." As Jesus said, we take up our cross daily and follow him. In his cross, we are cleansed and rescued. In our crosses, we learn the value of our Savior. We live by faith, for that is God's gift to us. But look! No. "By faith" our attention has been captivated by Christ! SDG Amen.